

Please keep our Magnet School System!

I am the mother of a student who has been attending the Academy of Arts Middle School for 2 ½ years. She started there in 6th grade and is now in 8th grade. I chose to enroll her in the Magnet School because she had a great affinity for art, music and dance and I felt that she wasn't getting enough of those programs in our local school system.

Since she started at the Art Academy, though, the impact on her has been immeasurable. The arts programs have been an amazing enrichment on her life, but even more so, the culture of learning, the support of the educators and staff, and the focus on academic success have helped her grow, both personally and academically. When she was in elementary school in our town, school was traumatizing for her. She felt she was "stupid" because she couldn't master the reading and math as quickly as some of the other students. I spent thousands of dollars, enrolling her in Sylvan tutoring to bring her up to her grade level for reading and math. She also felt isolated and unaccepted, because her interests were different than the mainstream interests in the town, namely sports and gymnastics. Anyone who didn't belong to these, really didn't have anything in common with the other kids. And none of the other kids in town shared her love and passion for art and music.

Now that she is in the Magnet School, she has excelled at all her academic topics, including math and reading, and has been consistently scoring at or above grade level. She also feels more comfortable with these subjects and has enough confidence in her abilities to assist classmates with their work. She has also made some amazing friends, who encourage her to be herself and embrace her interests, rather than shunning or demoralizing her for them. More importantly, she has been able to make friends with diverse backgrounds, ethnicities, and sexual orientation – opportunities that she wasn't afforded in a small, rural town. One can hardly believe what a transformation has occurred in my daughter as a result of simply being in a diverse, supportive, positive school environment.

As a parent, the school has been a wonderful experience. The Principal and Vice Principal are very proactive with communication and use multiple methods to reach out to parents regarding school business. The utilization of technology has been a huge help in staying connected and completing forms and permission slips while I work full-time. Additionally, both are very prompt with their responses if I do have a specific issue with my child.

It is also very important to me that my student have exposure to a diverse population. I, myself, grew up in a predominantly white, middle-class school district outside of Hartford. I remember being in High School and hearing about all the horrible things that happened in urban schools. I also remember the abject fear that my peers and coaches had whenever we had to play sports at a Hartford School. My coach told me on the bus to Weaver, "don't talk to anyone and don't say anything or you'll get us shot." It was as though we were going to face the Russian army, instead of a freshman volleyball team. I knew then that their fear was unfounded and racially biased, but it wasn't until the Sheff v. O'Neill ruling

brought an influx of urban students that those fears began to dissipate. It is so important that children are allowed to grow in an environment where everyone is equal and judged on merit and behavior, not race, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.

Losing this opportunity to have my daughter attend the Magnet School would crush us. She has gained so much here and is so looking forward to high school at the Arts Academy. Sending her back to her school in town, would mean losing her access to arts instruction and also losing her access to friends and the amazing teachers who have played such a critical role in her development over the past 2 ½ years.

Thank you,

Sincerely,

Megan Mooney